



Media Release (22/06/2017)

SASS calls for more appropriate penalties for child sex offenders

The Sexual Assault Support Service (SASS) expresses our disappointment that the Legislative Council did not pass the *Sentencing Amendment (Mandatory Sentencing for Serious Sexual Offences Against Children) Bill 2017*. Sentences need to reflect the magnitude of harm that child sexual abuse causes to victims and their families, and we feel that current sentences all too often do not do this.

From our extensive experience we know that victims of child sexual abuse experience a range of negative outcomes including psychological, emotional, behavioural and physical impacts. Child sexual abuse is often a lifelong sentence with impacts continuing on into adulthood. As a support service, SASS repeatedly sees the immense impact that abuse can have on the formation of these young, and often vulnerable identities.

Although the Bill itself failed we strongly hope that the momentum for change will continue, and we are encouraged by the strong bipartisan support demonstrated for increasing sentence lengths for child sex offenders.

We note that in a 2015 report into the sex offences sentencing the Sentencing Advisory Council presented several alternatives to mandatory sentencing to Government. These included guideline judgments and presumptive non-parole periods, as well as the creation of a new offence of aggravated sexual intercourse with a young person and an offence of maintaining a sexual relationship with a young person in circumstances of aggravation.

We encourage the Government to promptly revisit this report and begin exploration of the options recommended. Child sexual abuse victims deserve a justice system that better recognises their needs and interests, and the recent discussions surrounding mandatory minimum sentences demonstrate that the time is right to create this.

For more information on this media release please contact the SASS office on (03) 6231 0044 (although please note that the SASS CEO Jill Maxwell is currently interstate until 27 June 2017).